



PRESS RELEASE

House National Security Committee

Floyd D. Spence, Chairman

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CONTACT: Maureen Cragin
Ryan Vaart
(202) 225-2539

OPENING STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN FLOYD D. SPENCE

OPEN HEARING ON BOSNIA POLICY

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The committee meets today to consider U.S. policy in Bosnia and the Balkan region, and the proposed extension of participation by U.S. ground forces in Bosnia. The committee has spent many hours and heard much testimony on Bosnia in the past few years. As I think back, I am struck by how predictable the current situation in Bosnia is.

It is no secret that Congress and the American people have consistently opposed the deployment of large U.S. ground forces in Bosnia. The prospects for rapidly resolving the problems of that war-torn nation seemed distant two and one-half years ago and, despite the heroic efforts of U.S. and allied servicemen and women, they seem remote today as well. While I think there continues to be a significant role for the U.S. military to play in Bosnia, I believe that U.S. ground forces ought to be kept "over the horizon" while our military does what it is uniquely qualified to do – things such as logistics, communications, intelligence and air cover.

Nonetheless, President Clinton has committed American ground forces to a follow-on mission in Bosnia. He has at last admitted what has been obvious for some time: this is an open-ended commitment. Success or failure in Bosnia will be measured over the course of years, maybe even decades.

The President's decision has fundamentally changed the mission in Bosnia. No longer is our goal to give the Bosnians a "breathing space" during which they attempt to recreate their society and political system. The President is now committing U.S. troops to trying to achieve the goals set forth in the Dayton accords – the building of a democratic Bosnian political system, the introduction of the rule of law, and the creation of a free-market economy. None of these conditions has existed in Bosnia before.

In sum, we are looking at an open-ended commitment to a peacekeeping mission with little chance of near-term success. All in all, it is a commitment that leaves me with more questions than answers.